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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 YAOUNDE 000784

SIPDIS

DEPT ALSO FOR IO/UNP AND AF/C

PARIS ALSO FOR KANEDA

LONDON ALSO FOR LORD

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TAGS: PREL PGOV PBTS KCOR MOPS MARR NI UN CM

SUBJECT: CAMEROON: BIYA THANKFUL FOR USG ROLE, BUT WORRIED
ABOUT BAKASSI

Classified By: Ambassador Janet E. Garvey for reasons 1.4 b and d.

¶1. (S) Summary. Although concerned by efforts within Nigeria to derail the Greentree Accords, President Biya is confident that Nigerian President Yar'adua is committed to an August 14 handover of the Bakassi Peninsula. In an August 7 meeting with the Ambassador, Biya was effusively appreciative of Cameroon's relationship with the USG, especially ongoing and future security assistance, but was worried about the Government of Cameroon's (GRC) preparedness to take possession of Bakassi. Saying Remy Ze Meka, his Minister of Defense, was "completely corrupt," Biya foreshadowed Ze Meka's dismissal along with a cadre of corrupt senior military officers. End summary.

Yar'adua Committed. Others Weak-Kneed?

¶2. (C) Ambassador met with President Biya on August 7 for an amicable 90-minute conversation that focused on Bakassi but covered a range of topics, including corruption, governance and investment (septel). Biya said he is certain that Nigerian President Yar'adua wanted to move ahead with the August 14 handover of the remaining portions of the Bakassi Peninsula, but professed concern that others in the Government of Nigeria (GON) might be "weak-kneed." Biya said the GON had proposed holding the handover ceremony on August 12, but that he believed it would go ahead on the 14th and that he did not believe Cameroon could be ready by the 12th. Biya told the Ambassador he had been in frequent touch with UNSYG Ban Ki-Moon regarding the handover and that Ban plans a celebration of the Greentree Accord and handover during the UN General Assembly in September, which Biya will attend (septel).

GRC Unprepared to Secure Bakassi

¶3. (S) Emphasizing that he was counting on the USG and other witnesses to the Greentree Accords (UK, France, Germany) to help facilitate their implementation, Biya admitted he was worried about the GRC's readiness to take possession of Bakassi. In the short term, Biya said, responsibility for Bakassi security will be handled by a combination of 200 soldiers from the Rapid Intervention Battalion (know by its French acronym, BIR) and 200 soldiers from the regular army. (Note. The BIR exist outside the usual military chain of command and are under the authority of the former Israeli Defense Attache--now retired and a nationalized Cameroonian. The BIR were formed to deal with insecurity in Cameroon's northern regions, especially along the borders with Chad and the Central African Republic. Their reputation for professionalism was further burnished by

their adroit response to February social unrest in Douala and Yaounde. End note.)

¶4. (C) Worried that an overreaction from the GRC's armed forces could "result in claims of genocide," Biya said he had insisted that GRC officials not be "too aggressive" in Bakassi. Noting that Cameroon had won Bakassi "in a courtroom, not on the battlefield," Biya said he had cautioned his staff against gloating over Bakassi to avoid agitating its larger and more powerful neighbor. Biya welcomed and noted the Ambassador's suggestion that the GRC seek to place anglophone officials in Bakassi in order to communicate with the local populations.

Corruption Has Weakened
Cameroon's Military
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¶5. (S) Lamenting the weakness of his military, Biya said "it is such a shame that I have such a bad Minister of Defense." Referring to Remy Ze Meka the Minister Deleuge for Defense, Biya said: "He is completely corrupt, but I can not get rid of him before August 14." Biya added that members of his staff had warned him that firing the Defense Minister and the senior military officers (whom Biya has already disparaged as too old and corrupt, reftel) risked a "situation like Mauritania," but that he had argued that "a weak military is in itself destabilizing." Biya said he had seen photos of poorly equipped Cameroonian troops in Bakassi, who looked like a "ragtag" army.

USG Security Assistance:

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APS, ACOTA and DILS
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¶6. (C) Biya thanked the Ambassador for USG security assistance, including the timely delivery of two Zodiac-type patrol craft later this month and ongoing training under the ACOTA and APS programs. Biya welcomed the Ambassador's offer to take advantage of a September APS ship visit as an opportunity to bring Nigerian and Cameroonian military officials together to discuss collaboration on Bakassi and suggested adding officials from Equatorial Guinea and other countries in the Gulf of Guinea. Recalling that he had given his word to President Bush that the GRC would contribute to peacekeeping operations, Biya promised that Cameroon would move ahead with plans to train a battalion under ACOTA within the coming months. Biya also welcomed the USG's offer to host, under the aegis of the DOD's DILS program, an anti-corruption conference for military leadership and others.

GARVEY